A lean, hunched-over stranger stumbled into Sam's Bar in a crooked part of town, as lean, hunched-over strangers are wont to do. His face was obscured by the hood of a dark raincoat, because that is just how these things go. He stumbled as though he had been to and thrown out of six or seven bars that evening alone, and had indeed done so. If you were to look him square in the face - or at least as much of his face as you could see - it wouldn't take you more than a few seconds to identify him as a man going out of his way to be as cliché as possible, and… well, you know where that statement's going.

The sensations of the bar hit the stranger, and he snarled at them. Of *course* there was a card game in the corner, and a pool table in the other. Of *course* the patrons were mostly hard-looking men out to drown their sorrows in as much cheap hard booze as they could hold. Of *course* the place smelled like a piss-stained toilet and sounded like a raging storm, and all the other typical descriptions of seedy bars in the bad parts of town. At least the last six or seven had the decency to not be so *stereotypical.* Even if they had thrown him out into their back alleys.

He shuffled and pitched around the tables, bumping into several large, sneering men, and slumped up against the bar itself, his legs scrambling to find the stool. As he did so, the stranger banged his fist against the warped wood (again, fucking typical) and grunted towards the bartender. Please, please don't let him be a tall, thick-set man with a large mustache, bald head and half-exposed arms. Just let him be some normal guy. Maybe he won't be called Sam. Maybe he'll be someone like Dave, or Steve, or son of a bitch.

A tall, thick-set man with a large mustache, bald head and half-exposed arms sidled down the bar towards the stranger, polishing a glass with a dirty rag. The stranger glared at him from under his hood, and muttered something unpleasant to himself. There was a short pause, and the stranger opened his mouth to order (or maybe puke), but the bartender interrupted him.

"Look, buddy, you've probably got your own reasons for the hood, but I don't really tolerate mysterious stranger types in here. Hood goes down or you go out."

"Why'd you set the place up to attract 'em, then…" the stranger murmured, reaching up and pulling back his rainhood. He stared up at the bartender, who pulled a disgusted grimace.

"...really good reason there, pal."

The stranger's face looked like absolute hell. Dozens of knife-scars ran over a forehead and nose that looked as if they'd been pummeled against an alley wall enough to have put themselves back together through blunt force before getting broken again. His jaw seemed around three sizes too big for his face, and two inches too far to the left. This was the sort of face you couldn't get through a hundred bar fights; you had to *work* at getting your ass kicked for this kind of look. And the stranger had definitely worked at it, perfecting the bitter, drunken bar veteran face.

Except for his eyes, though. Staring out from the mug of the ugliest son of a bitch bastard you ever saw were two perfect, bright blue eyes.

It really weirded the bartender out.

"So what'll it be, then?" Sam asked, trying to focus on cleaning out the glass.

"Whatever nobody else orders," the stranger grumbled.

"Only got one sort of drink here, buddy."

"Course you do…"

While the bartender turned about to get the stranger's drink, the stranger fought with his body, which was doing its best to slide off of the stool. He flung a hand out, and propped himself up against a rather heavy man in a plaid-shirt - the usual sort, clean-shaven and wearing a trucker's hat - and heaved himself back into a semi-straight sitting position. His drink slid towards him, and he regarded it with an air of disdain for a moment. Why couldn't the place at least have a system of mixing drinks? It really was as typical as seedy bars came.

Oh well. Can't be too picky. With a little difficulty, he lifted the glass to his lips, and drank. Most of it even made its way into his mouth.

After several seconds, he slammed the glass back down - a little too hard; he may as well play along with with model - and groaned. "S'not fair, y'know? It just ain't s'not fair."

The bartender turned around, a weary look on his face. He may run the single most common, nondeviating bar in the world, but even he had gone through this part of the routine one too many times. Still, it was part of what he did, so he didn't have much of a choice in the matter. Besides, what's a seedy bar with a bartender who *wants* to hear your sob story? Placing his elbows on the counter, he leaned over and looked the stranger square in the face. "Alright, buddy. *What's* not fair?"

"Life," the stranger slurred, banging his glass a few more times.

"Well…" The bartender fumbled in his pockets, trying to find a cigarette to light. "That's just the way…"

"I mean, it's like… it's like they went and made us all, but they weren't really thinking, 'Hey! Maybe this guy won't be so useful one day!' And then they just went and *left* us like that. Sodding bastards is what they are. Sodding bastards is… what they… are…" His head drooped slightly.

Religious type, huh? He'd dealt with those before. Little difficult to work with, but he could manage. "Well…"

"And then!" His head jerked back up and he lunged to the side. "And then they go and lock you up in that goddamn house, and everybody just lies around all day because, *somehow*, it isn't natural for the dead to go around with the living. It's not like we're dead anyways! We're all the same sort of… things. Can't remember the term.

"Gods! That's what it was. We're all just gods! Not like any of us are more alive or dead than the other!"

The bartender stared at the stranger's scarred mug, along with several patrons close to him. He was half-shouting now, waving his glass about. "And it's all based on stereotypes up there! Got all sorts of gods running around, and we've all gotta look the part and act the part and *be* the part. Well I'm… I'm… I'mmmmmmmmmm ssssssick of the part. Whole system's fucked, including the part. Fuck the part.

"And *then*! And *then*! When I come down here to have a drink. When I come down here to have a drink, and I do my best to look like Joe Average… Like the kind of guy you don't mess with in a bar… Like just your ordinary guy… I stumble into the single most *typical* bar on the planet." He spat in his drink, went cross-eyed, and slumped down on the table.

His head jerked up, and he shouted, "Just fuck it all!" before falling back down again.

A squeaking noise began to sound out as the bartender went back to cleaning a glass. He waved to the other patrons, who were looking at the stranger as if they intended to beat and

rob him blind the second they were alone with him, and they went back to their drinks. Probably going to be a brawl in a few minutes. Probably going to wind up throwing the stranger out by the scruff of his coat into the back alley wall by the end of it. So long as he pays his bill first.

As the bartender walked away, the stranger groaned and lifted himself up, using the heavyset man as a prop again. His perfect eyes swiveled for a few seconds before he stared down into his drink, and tried to drink by sticking his nose in. Sputtering, he felt the man he had leaned on clapping him on the back, and turned to face him.

"So…" the man started slowly, clearly having drank as much as, if not more than the stranger intended to, "if you're trying to look like a typical bar guy, what's the problem with a typical bar?"

The stranger squinted at the man through one eye, and sighed, clutching his drink with both hands. "I ain't got much choice in the matter. S'all about the look where I come from. You put on a disguise, you gotta look as much like the disguise as possible. Some bullshit like that…"

"OK," the man said, with the air of one who isn't quite satisfied with the answer they got, but is too drunk to care. He took a long draw from his glass, draining it and dropping it heavily on the bar. He readjusted his cap, shifted around in his chair, and screwed up his features, trying to concentrate on something. The stranger took another unsteady gulp, also draining his glass.

"And… what's what about you being a god?"

"You need a… what do you call 'em? Thesauri? I'm a *god*. For all *that's* worth..."

"Like a *God* god, or a god of something?"

"God of something."

"God of what?" the man had fully turned about in his chair now, staring at the stranger as he pulled his raincoat a bit tighter around himself.

"Unbreakable Eyes."

The man let out a deep belly laugh and clapped the stranger hard on the back, slamming him against the bar hard enough to get the bartender's attention. He walked over, shot a weary glare at the patron who could barely keep himself upright from laughter, and took their glasses away, already furiously cleaning them. At length, the man calmed down, let out a few more sharp guffaws, calmed down again, giggled, and then shook the stranger's shoulder. "C'mon. Really? That's your story?"

There are worse feelings in the world than being slammed against a wooden bar by a man you don't know, but the stranger couldn't quite think of them as he raised himself back up. "Ain't a story. That's truth right there."

"Not volcanos or storms or… fuck, I don't know, helping kids cross the street?" He laughed again, clutching his sides. "I mean, that'd at least be believable. But come on. What are you *really* god of?"

He blinked as the stranger's hand shot under his nose. "You got anything sharp?"

Rifling through his pockets, the man shrugged. "Got a pocket knife." He pulled it out and showed it to the stranger, who quickly snatched it up and unfolded it. "It's a bit dull, and it sticks when you're trying to fold it back up, but…"

"It'll do." With a little strain, the stranger bulged one brilliant blue eye out, lifted a hand to

peel back a few drooping pieces of skin, and held the knife inches away from his face. He nodded at the man, who looked ready to tackle the knife away but didn't possess the reflexes or coordination to do so at the moment. The stranger's arm shook a little, and he plunged the knife forward.

There was a tearing sound, and the blade bounded straight off his eye, slashing him across the forehead.

The man uncertainly took his knife back, folded it with some difficulty, and stuck it back in his pocket. To his surprise, the stranger seemed none the worse for wear, not even noticing the sizable gash above his eye. Gesturing towards the wound, he asked, "Are you…"

"Like I said." He rubbed his temple, groaning a little. "Unbreakable eyes. And the disguise doesn't really bleed. Not much point to setting up all those little tubes and things and pumping 'em full of blood. Pain in the ass to clean up if you get cut."

"...really are invincible…" the man muttered to himself, wiping his brow.

"Not really. Just the eyes. You break a bone, that's… that's gonna be a bit harder than if you just cut me like I just did… but if you break a bone, it's gonna *hurt*, and I'll probably be down for weeks. Hell, if I had any flesh, a little cut'd probably take me out."

At a loss for words, the man just reached over and pinched the stranger's hand, giving him an awkward, questioning look.

"Ain't real. Just a disguise. Get with the picture, uh…?" He waved his hands vaguely.

"James," the man said, shaking his head slowly. "James Braddock. Hell, I'm wonderin' what they call *you*…"

The stranger groaned and buried his head in his hands. "Don't really have a proper name. God of Unbreakable Eyes is the best you get. But…" He groaned again and rubbed his face vigorously. "The few gods who are actually awake in the House call me Shatter."

James gave a weak laugh, still stunned by the stranger slicing himself across the face but slowly recovering. "Fucking stupid name. Got a better one?"

"Not really. Told you it was hell up there."

"Buddy," James slurred, reaching for his glass and grasping at empty air, trying to comprehend the concept of it being gone, "if your idea of hell is a bunch of dick gods calling you a stupid name, then I've got news for you…" His hand idly slid off the bar, his eyes tracking its progress. "I've got news for you. There's a whole lot worse places."

The God of Unbreakable Eyes sighed, picking at his face absentmindedly. "You don't get it. I'm stuck in the… the House of Life and Death. Guess it's cause of how I really look. There's no conversation to be had in that dump. No interaction with anyone worth interacting with. Everyone's either asleep or wandering around feeling sorry for themselves. And we can't… you can't… I… we can ever leave. Somethin' about life and death never mixing. Bullshit."

He stared at the counter, tracing whorls in the wood with his finger. "I've been up there a good twelve hundred years."

"And where's there?" James asked, pulling his arm back up.

"The Mountain."

"The mountain?"

"No, Mountain. It's one of those things where you've gotta pronounce the capitals.

Mystical crap an' that junk."

The two of them sat silently for a while, staring at the bar, occasionally hiccuping. At length, James turned to the god, and said, "Mind if I go back up with you?"

He coughed, and stared back at James. "Sorry. Could have sworn you asked to come up the Mountain with me."

"Yeah." James slumped over slightly and banged his fist on the bar. "Sounds interesting, you know? Never met a god before, Shatter, and I've never followed one home. Might be good for a few laughs."

Shatter rolled his eyes and went back to tracing patterns in the wood. "You're just drunk. Could be some random stranger rambling for all you know."

"Went out into the desert with some friends after a night on the town this one time," James mused. "Wound up bringing back some fucking cool souveraines after around.... two weeks out there. Met a few interesting people on the way back. Was a good time. Might wind up being like that again.

"*And*," he added, raising a declaratory finger, "I *am* bored and drunk. Don't need any other excuses."

Shatter pondered this for a moment. He'd never heard of a god bringing a human up the Mountain. Course, he'd never heard of gods doing anything much up on the Mountain. For all he knew, most of them followed his daily routine. Maybe there weren't any laws against it. And if there were, then fuck 'em. Wasn't any harm in mixing up his routine for a day. Show this guy around the House, the Death half of course, let him look out a few windows, be in and out in less than a few hours.

No problem whatsoever.

"Yeah, sure. Whatever." He dropped down on the bar, arms hanging at his sides.

"Now *that's* the spirit!" James beamed and clapped Shatter on the back, causing him to jerk up and look around wildly. What is it with this man and hitting people on the spine? "Just gotta figure out some way of paying you back."

"Don't think you have anything I'd want…"

"Eh. We'll figure it out eventually. So…" He ran his hands along the bar like he was smoothing them out. "How's being the God of Unbreakable Eyes work?"

Shatter raised his hands and flicked two fingers against his eyes, not even blinking. "I've got 'em. If anyone else has 'em - which they *don't*, mind you - I guess I exemplify 'em. Other than that, really not any-"

"Can ya give 'em to other people?"

Slowly blinking one eye at a time, Shatter thought about it. "...maybe. Never tried before. Didn't have a point to it. Maybe we could use that as an exchange. I take you up the Mountain, you get… wait… that's not… no…" He licked his lips as his head lolled.

"Woah, hey there!" James backed away on the stool and raised his hands up. "Sounds really fucking cool, but I'm not about to let you go fucking around with *my* eyes." He cast around the room, looking for a good mark before settling on a rather tall, muscular man in a sweaty wife beater. "How 'bout that guy?" Shatter looked over, shrugged his shoulders, and got off his stool.

His target was in the process of lighting a cigarette when a pair of greasy hands reached

around his head and jammed their fingers into his eye sockets. The man screamed and reached up, grabbing the hands and twisting them about. Shatter groaned and fell to his knees as the man turned around, glared at him, and kneed Shatter right in the face. His nose broke and several tears appeared in his disguise, sending him sprawling to the floor, clutching his face.

The bar had been waiting for an excuse to break out into a fight ever since the stranger had insulted their favorite place, and now not only was there an excuse, but a damn good chance to beat on the stranger *and* each other to boot. Every patron turned to his neighbor or the man behind him, and began flinging their fists, throwing chairs, smashing bottles - all the usual bar fighting conventions. Unimaginative men in an unimaginative institution.

Having spent the last ten minutes watching the loud pair, the bartender knew exactly who to throw out. James and Shatter flew across the alleyway behind the bar, and hit the opposite wall face first, sliding down into the muck below. Shatter picked himself up, groaning, while James just lay there laughing.

"Well," he blurted, trying to pick himself up and slipping back down into the garbage pile, "guess you can't after all!"

"Shut the fuck up, Jones." Steadying himself against the wall, Shatter tried to take a few steps away, but lost his balance and toppled down right next to his companion.

"James."

"Who gives a shit?"

"So." He steadied himself up into a vague slumped over sitting position and looked at the god at his side. "When you wanna get going?"

"Sure as hell not right now." Shatter picked at his face and groaned. "Fuck, he knocked it out of place... Not comin' back to this joint any time soon…"

James snorted and slapped his hand against the ground, ignoring the trash littering it. "Yeah. If we went there in this state, we'd probably get thrown in god jail or some shit like that."

"There is a god jail, you know," Shatter said, now pulling at his face with both hands. "Never been there myself, but it's apparently stupid efficient. Dammit, I hate doing this…"

"Wouldn't have guessed…" James started before trailing off. He was too busy staring at Shatter's face to keep going. Or rather, his lack of a face. The god had slid his flesh off, and now sat there rubbing bare bone with his free hand. His eyes seemed to float in the sockets, their bright blue color standing out even more against the stark white.

He lolled his neck around to face James and grunted. "What're *you* looking at?"

James screwed up his features and pointed. "Your fucking face, man."

"If you're gonna make a big deal out of something as simple as this, I'm not taking you up the Mountain. You get that?"

"It's fucking weird, though."

"Get used to it, then." He pushed himself away from the wall and stood uncertainly, taking a few steps before turning about and looking down at James. "We'll go tomorrow. Till then, I need a place to crash. You better have a free bed."

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There's only so much you can expect of a narrator to describe in detail. The entire goal of literary narration is to describe events in either an accurate or stylized way, but some events

simply cannot be described in any means other than broad strokes. Established languages just fall apart.

James Braddock's attempt to explain his life to Shatter on their way back to his apartment is one of those events. Drunken English, *proper* drunken English, cannot be conveyed in any accurate, literal way, because it will usually wind up something like this:

"Udan' liememeilie ehhehehhhhtowwwll iiyyeaa, Bai kheamnmknot buggingtly t-t-t-t toilylya wohowohow fucking ungungrayiy Yai wuzsz den…"

(The swear words tend to come through clearer than everything else, for some reason.)

And more stylized means of communicating the conversation will almost always over-rely on words like "slurred", "stumbled", and "somehow belched and shouted at the top of his lungs at the same time, scaring every stray cat on the block." One cannot use these phrases too much, for the risk of diminishing their effectiveness when they are actually needed. As such, the essential, and some nonessential, elements of James Braddock's life will be presented in a summarized form.

Even though he wore a trucker's cap, James wasn't actually a trucker himself. He had been a mechanic, but it had been around six or seven months since he actually went into the shop. Something about him drinking too much - he hadn't caught the reason on account of being drunk at the time. Drinking had been his main activity over the last half year, actually.

Shatter had joked about him being a lost God of Drunkards. James didn't deny it.

He wasn't really a bad guy, all things considered. He was constantly drunk, but he wasn't *violently* drunk. He'd lost his job, but when he was out of the bottle he was a decent, hardworking man. Respected his fellow man, paid his taxes with the money he had saved up, got along well with the other tenants in his apartment. Around as average as Joe Average came.

Aside from one little thing, though. James really liked to, in some of the few words he spoke that night that were remotely translatable, "get my ass lost and work my way back home." He'd been all over the country on these sort of escapades, and had picked up every sort of trinket and contact you could imagine along the way. Deserts, forests, cities, marshes, he'd found himself half-naked with a beer can in one hand and someone else's car keys in another in the other.

He'd gotten around this far in his story before falling down on the doorstep of his apartment. James and Shatter had dragged themselves into the darkened room, and flopped down on the couch and floor respectively before settling into a drunken half-sleep.

Now, in the early hours of the morning, with sunlight spilling through a grimy window over his face, Shatter turned over the events of the previous evening in his head. The alcohol was leaving his mind, letting him finally get around to the important questions. Questions like: What the hell am I doing?

James seemed like a nice enough guy. Not really likely to start any trouble when they got up on the Mountain. And he seemed the type who wouldn't freak out and get his eyes burned from of their sockets at the sight of its supposed majesty and brilliance. But at the same time, that personality struck him as the sort of thing liable to get them in major trouble. The man would probably do something idiotic like insist that they climb all the way up to the top, where the Main House stood, and do a tour de force downwards through every single other residence.

Shatter barely had any idea what his own House was like. He didn't like the prospect of running around the Houses of War or Hatred with some mortal tagging along, trying to pick up trinkets for his collection.

Well, he could always try to dissuade him. If worst came to worst, he could just whack James over the head hard enough to knock him stone cold unconscious, and deposit the body back in the apartment. And if he couldn't get the jump on him, then he'd just have to drag James back kicking and screaming. Pretty much anything was better than getting caught without their asses covered in the House of Justice.

He stretched out and rubbed at his face. James had insisted on their way back Shatter wear the disguise in order to stop freaking him out, and it was starting to itch. On the outside, it may be a perfect replica of an ugly son of a bitch bastard, but whoever made it clearly hadn't taken into account the wearer's comfort. Shatter sometimes wished he could shapeshift or project illusions like some other gods, but that would just make him even more pointless. What use was there for a God of Unbreakable Eyes who could turn his arm into a snake?

Christ, though, did the mask bug him. He didn't have any nerve endings, but the damn thing still managed to itch like crazy if he wore it overnight. Rolling over, he stared at James lying on the couch, one arm slumping over the side, the occasional snore escaping his nose. It'd probably be hours until he woke up. Couldn't hurt to take this thing off for a few minutes.

Shatter's lefthand fingers slipped under the nearly-invisible neckline of his disguise, and he hooked it through the eyeballs with his right, slowly pulling it off.

"Thought I asked you to keep that fucking thing on."

Shatter yelped at the sudden comment and sat bolt upright, fake fingernails scraping his eyes and tearing the flesh of his disguise, leaving two slash-marks above the eyeholes. It didn't hurt or leave any permanent marks on his real body, but the sudden force sent the twin orbs tumbling out of place. His view quickly slid up as they fell back, bouncing about the inside of his skull before settling at the bottom of his jaw. Great. Just what he wanted this early in the morning - an inside view of a bloated illusory tongue.

"Well," he grunted, leaning his head forward and keeping his teeth clenched to prevent them from going anywhere else, "I *will*. But you have to watch *this* instead." The lumpy, off-center jaw slid open, and Shatter's eyes rolled into his outstretched hand. With a chuckle, the god turned to face James, staring at him with twin black holes before slowly reinserting each white ball back into its socket. One squeaked a bit as it went in, while the other created a wet *schlick*ing sound. He shook his head to check if they were secure, and asked, "That better?"

Since he was still half-asleep, James could only lay there and stare through half-closed lids at the horrific display before him. "If that's how you're going to start my morning, you can take it off, fuckin' psycho."

"*Thank* you." Shatter gripped at his face again, and swept it off in one swift motion, revealing the bare bone underneath once more. In the somewhat better light of James' apartment, it was more apparent his skull had seen better days - multiple deep cracks ran throughout the upper dome, and one of the eye sockets seemed a little too large on account of missing a good inch or so of bone around its circumference. Even without a deliberately ugly mug of a mask, the God of Unbreakable Eyes still looked like a disaster of a person.

James grunted and pulled himself off the couch, pretending to rub the sleep out of his

eyes for an excuse not to look at Shatter. “Can’t be dealing with this right now… gotta get some coffee or… somethin’...” He trundled about, staggering past his unsightly guest and into the small kitchen. The curtain swung shut behind him, and soon a burbling sound started up behind it.

When he wasn’t stone-dead drunk, Shatter found the guy to be a bit of an asshole. Sure, he had every right to be disturbed by his face, but he didn’t have to go telegraphing it, did he? Looking around, he turned his eyes on the door, and contemplated leaving for a moment. After all, even though he’d made a promise last night, he’d been more inebriated than he’d gotten in a good seven weeks. There wasn’t a NEED to keep any kind of promise to a human, especially not one blatantly suicidal as taking him up the Mountain. He could just slip out right now, slink back to his room in the House, and forget any of this ever happened. Let the man think he’d just talked to the fading remnants of a booze-induced hallucination.

But… he groaned and flopped back down, head clunking against the hardwood. Hadn’t he just had this same conversation with himself a few minutes earlier? He was chasing the matter round in circles in his head and not getting anywhere with it. Take the bastard up the Mountain and run the risk of divine wrath from some god who actually matters, or leave him behind and continue facing down an eternity of boredom. Neither option sounded particularly pleasant… although at least dragging James along would break up the monotony.

And it’s not like they’d toss him down with the Disgraces for TOO long, right?

“Dammit…” he muttered, pulling himself up off the floor and dusting the human disguise off. Fine then. He’d take James up. No more running around in circles or agonizing over the potential consequences. Up the Mountain, show him around, down the Mountain, that’s it. There. Final decision. Done.

Stretching a little and feeling his bones crack in several places, Shatter found himself idly glancing around the walls of the apartment. James certainly hadn’t been kidding when he said he enjoyed getting lost in the strangest places. Some people wind up decorating their homes with trinkets from tourist trap gift shops; snowglobes, knick-knacks, maybe occasionally some odd little item they picked up off the ground a little ways off the path. Others make pretensions to being cultured and litter the place with all manner of foreign decor that they bought off Amazon. James Braddock coated his home in the strangest assortment of *things* Shatter had ever seen.

Upon the dozens of poorly maintained shelves were little trinkets of every shape imaginable. He had at least fifty pieces of brightly colored glass shards, about half of which were coated in dirt and grime even more colorful than the surface they clung to. Scraps and fragments of dark, blurry photographs sat inside warped wooden frames, some of which held the odd jewel (or perhaps very shiny rock) in the corner. Here and there pieces of old circuit boards lay between perfectly maintained bags of chips from lines discontinued around the mid-1990s. There wasn’t a single snowglobe in sight, although he did have what looked like the lower half of one from out by Wickenburg with the contents and dome removed.

Shatter couldn’t make sense of any of it. A man might find himself carrying these things after weeks lost in the desert, but what could possibly possess him to bring them all back home and arrange them so proudly on the wall? He didn’t even see one item on the wall indicating this man worked as a mechanic. Come to think of it, how did he even stay in this place? The

god understood that some humans had an arrangement with landlords, and he couldn't possibly imagine someone coming by this place to collect five months worth of rent and letting the occupant stay after seeing all of this. In fact…

Whatever he was about to think next died in the back of his skull as his eyes slid over the centerpiece of James' collection. Planted exactly at eye level, on a shelf all by itself, sat a perfectly intact human skull. None too odd by itself - even if it was significantly less fragmented than the other items on the wall - but something about it rubbed Shatter the wrong way. In something of a trance, he reached out and took it into his falsely fleshy hands, turning it over and examining it closely. There were a few cracks here and there, and though it was hard to tell, he could just barely make out a few crudely made stitches running through the bone.

Rotating it back around to face him, Shatter felt as if the skull was pulling on him. Like it wanted his eyes to shoot out of his face and plunk directly into it. As he gazed deeper and deeper into the empty sockets, a realization slammed directly into his bony face.

"Why the fuck've you got one of my old..."

"Like it?" James asked from behind, holding two overlarge cups of black coffee in his hand. Shatter yelped and jumped a mile, keeping his hands tight around the skull so as not to drop it. He whirled around to face James, eyes as wide as they could get without a face to contextualize them.

"S'the fuckin' weirdest thing," he continued, walking over to the couch and throwing himself down into it. "Found it around… I wanna say five, six years back. Was up in northern Arizona with Keith and Michael for Tequila Sunrise, and wound up out in the woods after we all had 'bout ten or twelve too many for our own good. Spent a few days trying to get back to civilization and constantly turning ourselves around over and over again. Can't remember how I got the rest of the things from that trip, but I remember that one."

"...how'd it happen? You coming across it, I mean," Shatter asked, shoving the skull back into place without any care for how it spun about or teetered on the edge once his hands whipped away.

"Keith tried to bash my brains in with it."

"Oh." Now he just stood there, looking like a gormless idiot without a face. "Sounds… pleasant."

"Ah, that's just Keith. I've lost count of how many dents he's nearly put in my noggin... although I CAN tell you he actually managed." James laughed loudly, practically bellowing and spilling coffee all over his shirt. Shatter joined in hesitantly, trying in the back of his mind to figure out when he'd been down that way and lost an entire head. "Anyways, we eventually made our way back to town, had us a few more drinks, and went back home. When I got here, still had the skull in my bag and figured hell, why not put it there. Really ties the shit together, huh?"

James slurped at his coffee, gasped at the heat, and slammed it down on the table with a little bit more gentleness than the previous night. "Something wrong with you, man? Didn't mean any offense by the comment earlier."

Shatter took his skull into his hands and shook it, trying to dislodge the thought from his mind. He was just seeing things, that was it. No way in hell the stranger he bumped into had a skull he'd had to have lost nearly five hundred years ago. He wasn't half that clumsy, and the

universe not even an iota that twisted in its sense of humor. Just put the whole business out of sight and try to focus on the conversation at hand.

Looking up again, he walked over to the couch and plopped down next to James, staring at anything on the wall but the skull. “How’d you have that thing gawking at you all the time and then get all freaked out by me?” There. A little bit of sardonic edge to ease things up again.

“In all fairness,” James replied, glancing sidelong at Shatter, “it ain’t moving and doesn’t have any eyes floating without support. I’m gonna need some time to get used to that. Hopefully when we’re up on the mountain. Anyways…” he reached over to the table and picked up the unused mug, offering it to his guest. “You drink?”

“Only if it knocks me out and makes me forget how much my life sucks.”

“Hey, coffee can do that for you,” James said, swilling the mug around in his hands like he was dispensing some sage wisdom. “Only cept instead of blacking you out, it gives you so much energy you can’t think about anything.”

Shatter gave James a sidelong glance before scooting over to the other side of the couch and saying, “Think I’ll pass. Probably tastes like shit anyways.”

“Heathen,” James grunted, chugging down half the mug in one go.

“You say to an actual god.”

“Ah, don’t give me that,” James groaned, half joking. “All the way back last night you complain at me about how hard everything is for you, how you’re at the very bottom of the totem pole, all about every last woe in your life. Trying to pull an ‘I’m a god don’t cross me’ act now ain’t gonna net you dick. You haven’t even given me proper proof you’re a god of anything yet.”

Grinding his teeth, Shatter stood up, turned about to face James, and smacked the back of his head. His optics shot out straight away, one landing pupil up in one of James’ cups upon the table. “That’s about all the proof you’re gonna get,” he replied as his conversationalist scrambled away from the starring orb. “They operate independently of my head, don’t need to be hooked up to anything to work, and won’t scratch no matter how hard you try. Rest of me’s brittle as arthritic cancer patients,” he added, turning his skull to briefly show off the new cracks his blow created, “but I just won’t die.

“Immortal, weird power, title,” he said, swishing both hands through the air with every point. “I’ve never met anyone with a better claim who had anything more.”

The horror that had overtaken James seemed to slowly dissipate as he remembered just what fascinated him so much about Shatter in the first place. “Alright, sorry, sorry,” he said, rubbing a hand to his face. “Just still doesn’t seem real. Keep worrying I’m gonna blink and you won’t be there anymore, like I’ve been sitting here spiking my own coffee the whole time. Maybe,” he addd, heaving himself up off the couch and smacking his lips, “I’ll have a better time at believing if you take me up there soon.

“Oh. Right. Yeah…” Shatter briefly started debating himself about the advisability of doing so again, before quickly shutting down the conversation. He’d been over this way too many times - better to just haul him along and be done with it rather than keep stalling. “Yeah, we can get going soon. No problem.”

“Sounds great,” James said, clapping him on the back as he passed. Shatter grunted; he swore a vertebrae or five shifted. “Just need a moment to get myself cleaned up and we can hit the road.”

As he left the room, Shatter prepared himself for the journey as well. Firstly, he shoved all thoughts of doubt and disaster deep, deep into the recesses of his mind, and clamped a tight lock on them. Then, he brought his hands up to his neck, and began pulling the rest of his disguise off, only to find it stuck again. Stupid thing always refused to go past his shoulders. He grappled with it for a minute, ripping open half his fingers in the process. Once it hooked on his shoulder blades for the third time, though, he decided he'd had enough of it. This ragged thing was years past its retirement point anyways. With a single shredding motion, he rendered the entire outfit from his body.

If Shatter's face left James shocked, he'd certainly find the God's true appearance downright appalling. Beneath the cracked, crumbling skull stood a yellowed skeleton that looked as though a team of grave robbers had a particular grudge against its owner. Half the ribs sat at jagged angles fit more for poking through organs than protecting them. Vertebrae weaved back and forth in a hunched-backwards, undulating pattern, with several gaps where the suit pulled them free. Staples littered the arms and legs, stacked more than a dozen high in some places. That he stood under his own power could only be attributed to his status as a deity.

Then a leg snapped off, and Shatter collapsed to the ground in a heap.

"Always happens, always FUCKING happens," he groaned dragging himself across the hardwood floor, groping around for the broken limb.

When James reentered, wearing a slightly less sweat-stained set of plaid shirt and blue jeans from the previous night, he almost pulled the curtain to his bedroom straight off the poll. Glaring up at his shocked gasp, Shatter gave a "you should be used to this by now" headshake, and snapped his leg back into place. He raised himself back to a standing position and hobbled around experimentally, the femur clearly not ready to support his weight again.

"Just have to make due…" he moaned. "Get your ass over here so we can do this, the sooner we're up there the sooner I can get this properly fixed."

It took James a second to find his voice again, eyes still fixed on a series of cracks in the right clavicle. "You, uh… you sure you're good to travel?"

"No. You sure you're good with me hanging around here while that thing rots on your floor?" He indicated his shed disguise, which was starting to bubble and pop as it immolated itself.

"...no." James promptly grabbed his trucking hat off the coffee table and made his way to the door.